United Nations E/CN.6/2006/NGO/9

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
23 January 2006

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Fiftieth session
27 February-10 March 2006
Item 3 (c) (ii) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels

Statement submitted by Northern Ireland Women's European Platform, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* E/CN.6/2006/1.

06-21834 (E) 060206

Statement

1. The Northern Ireland Women's European Platform is an umbrella organisation with over 50 organisations from voluntary and community groups, trade unions, statutory organisations faith groups which aims to ensure that the voice of women in Northern Ireland contribute to the debates on women's concerns at local, regional, national, European and international levels. We welcome the opportunity offered by CSW for governments and NGOs to discuss in relation to the thematic issues *Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels*.

2. Women universally are prime carers in families and communities and they have a huge interest in community stability, so they play important roles in peace-building in unofficial ways. Women in Northern Ireland have bridged divides across traditional religious and cultural divisions.

3. Although the number of women involved in the Northern Ireland negotiations that led to the Belfast Agreement was relatively small, the quality of their contribution was valuable and significant. The role of women in any peace process should be considered in its broadest sense by including community-based women and women from other areas of public and political life, but in Northern Ireland, as in other post conflict societies, this inclusion must be sustained if the commitment to the Belfast Agreement to ensure 'equal opportunity in all social and economic activity' is to be delivered.

4. There is a lack of will among member states not to ensure women's participation in decision making during peace negotiations as a priority. But to include women in political decision-making in post conflict societies is to take seriously gender justice, gender equality, women's human rights and the rebuilding of relationships because:

    - women and men are affected by conflict and therefore are affected by the consequences of peace agreements These agreements are not merely about ending war, they are also about establishing the conditions for new just societies where plural perspectives are taken into account
    - women's inclusion in all stages of peace processes is essential for inclusive social justice
    - women in political, policy and legal decision-making contexts often makes a difference to the sorts of issues addressed like education, health, nutrition, childcare and human security needs in places

5. Establishing that women need to be integral to any peace building which is recognised by the UN Security Council in the Resolution 1325 and the European Resolution on the participation of women in peaceful conflict resolution is only part of the process - involvement in political, economic and social leadership structures is essential and where women are clearly underrepresented if peace to be sustained.

We urge member states to recognise the need for women in decision-making and leadership roles in peace building and to consider the following recommendations:

1. To ensure that at least 40% of women are included in all reconciliation, peacekeeping, peace-enforcement, peace-building and conflict prevention posts
2. To identify and modify processes which may hinder a women from applying for a position in decision-making
3. To identify and provide mechanisms to enable women to access decision-making positions through training, gender action plans, and incentives

4. To support non-governmental organisations and research institutes to research women's participation in the area of foreign policy at national and international levels, and
5. To ensure that local peace building initiatives are fostered and supported by government.

Women and Decision-making in Northern Ireland since the Peace Process:-

Political - of the 108 members elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly 17 are women

no elected political parties has a women as leader

Policing – although positive action to increase recruitment of women the current female representation is 16.47% given that 37% (source 2005) of applications received were from women, the priority remains focused on religious monitoring rather than gender

the Policing Board has 19 members of whom only two are women

Judicial - no women high court judges

Monitoring – no women selected on the Independent Monitoring Board to monitor paramilitary activity
Public Bodies - 34% of women in public bodies, but mainly in health and education

Positive steps forward in gender equality

- Female Police Ombudsman
- 3 out of seven women were elected to the Parades Commission (last Parades Commission had no women)